Ministry of Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

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EFP ENCOURAGES SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES

Environmental Farm Plans (EFPs) are voluntary self-assessment tools that have agricultural producers across Saskatchewan thinking about sustainability.

Under an EFP, producers follow their own action plans to minimize the risk they pose to the environment.

The Provincial Council of Agriculture Development and Diversification Boards (PCAB) delivers the program to Saskatchewan producers, but EFP Co-ordinator Tamara Weir-Shields credits the success of the initiative to the province's farmers. Since the program's inception in 2005, more than 10,000 farmers have completed plans, surpassing the original goal of 6,500.

"Saskatchewan farmers have definitely taken a lead role in the environmental farm planning," she said.

There are many reasons behind producers' adoption of the EFP strategy. "The Plan is a great management tool. It brings about a keen awareness of an agricultural operation's environmental footprint, and it definitely helps in making decisions on the farm," said Weir-Shields.

Beyond environmental and social responsibility, the implementation of sustainable practices contributes to the reputation and competitiveness of Canadian agriculture in world markets.

On an individual level, producers can greatly increase the efficiency of their operations with a Farm Plan. Depending on the Beneficial Management Practices (BMPs) they intend to adopt, farmers may be eligible for cost-shared funding through the Canada-Saskatchewan Farm Stewardship Program.

Participation in the EFP program involves a five-step process. It begins with an introductory workshop where producers are educated on natural risks related to soil and site characteristics. They are also trained to complete a self-assessment of their operations and practices using a workbook.

According to Weir-Shields, 13,674 producers have completed the first workshop to initiate the Environmental Farm Plan process and learn how to do the self-assessment.

Upon completing the self-assessment at home, producers return to a second workshop to learn how to develop an Environmental Farm Action Plan. The components include economic feasibility, diversification and future planning.

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Producers have the option of anonymously submitting their action plans for peer review. The Peer Review Committee checks the plans to see that they are reasonable, feasible and rational.

Action plans approved by the Peer Review Committee are then endorsed by PCAB. When their plans have been endorsed, producers are eligible to apply for funding to implement BMPs.

The EFP process has been successful in exposing producers to a new approach to sustainability. According to Weir-Shields, the most common feedback she receives is, "It really makes you think." She says the vast majority of producers who have tried the five-step program find it to be a valuable exercise.

Saskatchewan's EFP program is offered as part of the federal government's Agricultural Policy Framework. The goals are to manage business risk, ensure food safety and quality, enhance science and innovation, protect the environment and strive for renewal.

Producers interested in developing an Environmental Farm Plan should contact PCAB at 1-866-298-7222 for information on upcoming workshops.

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